

Polls Close in Historic Iraqi Elections

Sunday, January 30, 2005



BAGHDAD, Iraq — The polls in Iraq have closed, ending the country's first open elections in more than 50 years and setting a course for what U.S. officials hope will be a long democratic future.

All around the country, Iraqis defied threats of violence and cast their votes. Officials said turnout among the 14 million eligible voters appeared higher than the 57 percent that had been predicted, although it would be some time before any turnout figure was confirmed. Iraq's Independent Electoral Commission initially estimated 72 percent.

The election will create a 275-member National Assembly and 18 provincial legislatures. The assembly will draw up the country's permanent constitution and will select a president and two deputy presidents, who in turn will name a new prime minister and Cabinet to serve for 11 months until new elections are held.

The election is a major test of President Bush's goal of promoting democracy in the Middle East. If successful, it also could hasten the day when the United States brings home its 150,000 troops. More than 1,400 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war.

About 300,000 Iraqi and American troops were on the streets to protect voters, who entered polling stations under loops of razor wire and the watchful eye of rooftop sharpshooters.

Shiite Muslims, estimated at 60 percent of Iraq's 26 million people, were expected to turn out in large numbers, encouraged by clerics who hope their community will gain power after generations of oppression by the Sunni minority.

Iraqis in 14 nations also held the last of three days of overseas balloting on Sunday, with officials in Australia extending polling station hours because of an earlier riot and bomb scare. More than 70 of the 281,000 registered overseas voters had cast a ballot, according to Adel al-Lami of the Independent Electoral Commission.

At one polling place in Baghdad, soldiers and voters joined hands in a dance, and in Baqouba, voters jumped and clapped to celebrate the historic day. At another, an Iraqi policeman in a black ski mask tucked his assault rifle under one arm and took the hand of an elderly blind woman, guiding her to the polls.

1. Roughly what percentage of American troops have been killed in comparison to the present number of troops presently serving in Iraq?
2. How many more Iraqis voted than the initial estimate?
3. How many Shiite Muslims reside in Iraq? How many are Sunni's?
4. If all registered overseas voters participated in the election, what fraction of the total votes would they make up?
5. If there were 40,000 polling sites, about how many Iraqi and American troops were on the streets to protect voters at each location?
6. If early predictions are an accurate participation of Iraqi voters in this election will exceed that of any presidential election in the United States. How might this be explained?
7. In your personal opinion, given the initial figures of voter turnout, etc. do you feel as if the people of Iraq welcome democracy and being liberated? Explain in paragraph form.
8. What new information have you learned in this edition of The Daughtry Times?